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स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण मंत्रालय
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
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Nirman Bhavan, New Delhi-110108

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Dear STOs,

In view of the ongoing COVID-19 situation in the country and the restrictions initiated across country till 15th April 2020, it is to be noted that **ALL** facilities under National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) should continue to be fully operational in the interest of public and TB patients at large.

1. All staff under NTEP should be equipped with basic knowledge of COVID-19 in order to guide the TB patients/community accordingly.
2. **People ill with COVID-19 and TB show similar symptoms such as cough, fever and difficulty in breathing. Both diseases attack primarily the lungs and although both biological agents transmit mainly via close contact, the incubation period from exposure to disease in TB is longer, often with a slow onset. While experience on COVID-19 infection in TB patients remains limited, it is anticipated that people ill with both TB and COVID-19 may have poorer treatment outcomes, especially if TB treatment is interrupted.**
3. **TB Diagnostic centers:**
 - a) MoHFW has prepared IEC material for COVID19 which is attached with this advisory for immediate display in all health facilities (Public and Private, diagnostic as well as therapeutic) and for provider as well as public awareness.
 - b) All Designated Microscopy Centers (DMC), Intermediate Reference Laboratory (IRL) /Culture & DST Labs, Rapid molecular testing labs under NTEP to ensure uninterrupted services.
 - c) Collection of sputum is to be carried out in open well-ventilated area in public as well as private labs. Health care workers should observe Standard Operational Procedures (SOP) for sample collection and handling.
 - d) Universal safety precautions including appropriate disposal of biomedical waste and repeated hand washing must be strictly followed while receiving and testing samples along with social distancing advisory implementation.
 - e) Until specimen transport mechanism is completely restored, only priority specimens (including specimens from People Living with HIV/ AIDS, Pediatric, Extra-

pulmonary) to be sent to the linked laboratory for diagnosis. These specimens are to be stored in the refrigerator (2-8 degree Celsius) with appropriate labeling (including patient name, NIKSHAY ID and date of specimen collection) for subsequent testing.

- f) Triple Layered Masks or N95 Mask and hand sanitizers for staff, patients and care givers to be made available along with counseling for cough etiquette and proper disposal of sputum to avoid transmission. Daily disinfection of facility surfaces to be carried out.
- g) Ensure adequate hands-on training on COVID-19 & Infection Prevention & Control (IPC) among NTEP staff from local administration. Hospital In-charge (Public as well as Private), Microbiologists, clinicians with NTEP Program officers to demonstrate hand washing technique and monitor lab and health facility infection prevention and control measures.

4. Treatment and patient support:

- a) Patients with respiratory symptoms need to be encouraged to follow respiratory hygiene using alternatives to facemasks (e.g., tissues to cover cough) within and outside the facility before confirmed TB or other diagnosis.
- b) All TB patients (Public as well as Private) to be advised on precautions, to protect themselves from COVID-19 and to continue their TB treatment as prescribed.
- c) All health facilities (including private health facilities and PHIs), treatment support centers need to ensure prompt initiation of all diagnosed TB patients on TB treatment and counseling of TB patients for Infection prevention of contacts and reporting of any symptomatic in family or in surrounding.
- d) In case those TB patients already diagnosed do not turn up for treatment initiation/ continuation due to lockdown or any other 'administrative/psychological/social barrier', STS/Treatment supporter should contact the patient at the earliest, in his household (if necessary) and initiate on TB treatment. *NTEP staff as well as TB patients to carry ID card to prevent any kind of interruption in TB diagnostic and treatment service delivery during the lockdown scenario. Health of patient and healthcare worker to remain a priority during such field movements.*
- e) In case of Private notified TB patients, Private healthcare providers need to contact local NTEP / JEET / Patient Provider Support Agency (PPA Project staff who may be requested to contact the said private TB patient at the earliest for treatment and other service linkage to avoid initial loss to follow up.
- f) All patient to be provided TB toll free helpline number to avert any service interruption during lockdown period (1800-11-6666) and NTEP team to process DBT payments of private provider as well as TB patients
- g) Provision of PPE in the form of masks and patient education leaflet for COVID 19 and TB to private health facilities and private TB patients

- h) Provision of anti-TB drugs for 1-month duration to all TB patients (public and private), including Drug-resistant TB patients, to ensure uninterrupted availability of anti-TB drugs for the patient along with counselling for cough hygiene, adherence and nutrition, infection prevention measures for close contact and approaching healthcare provider (Public or Private) in case of adverse event, if any.
- i) For Directly Observed Treatment of public sector TB patients - telephonic monitoring by Treatment supporter, digital adherence tools and Nikshay Sampark services should be optimally utilized. For Private notified TB patients – Telephonic/Video Call monitoring by Treatment supporter / JEET / PPSA project staff to minimize patient travel and periodic interaction with TB patients for adherence monitoring
- j) All TB patients need to be screened for co-morbidities as per extant guidelines and linked to appropriate management if found co-morbid. Linkage to critical care services needs to be established for those with compromised lung function.
- k) All Drug-Resistant TB centers to strictly observe Infection, Prevention and Control measures, including availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), biomedical waste management, etc.

5. Other programme management activities:


- a) All training activities, Patient Provider Meeting and other NTEP meetings/gathering, State Internal Evaluations (SIE), supervisory visits, review meetings, etc should be avoided until the prevalent situation is normalized.
- b) Salaries to all contractual staff should be ensured on a timely basis.
- c) In case patient need any support and unable to contact you, they may be advised to call on TB toll free helpline 1800-11-6666.
- d) For COVID-19 response, all guidelines / instructions issued by the General Health System for NTEP staff by the State Government / NHM should be abided and complied with.

For any clarification or further queries, you may please contact:

- Dr Raghuram Rao (raor@rntcp.org)
- Dr Deepak Balasubrahmaniam (balasubrahmaniamd@rntcp.org)

Enclosure:

As above

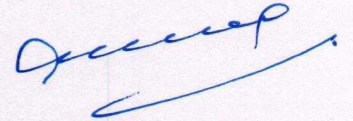


(Dr. K. S. Sachdeva)

To: All State TB officers

Copy to:

- PPS to Jt. Secretary (TB) MOHFW, GoI
- Mission Director-National Health Mission (NHM)/Additional Chief Secretaries/Principle Secretaries/ Secretaries – All State/UTs
- All NRL, IRL and STDCs
- All Nodal Drug Resistant TB Centers
- NTEP NTF Chair, ZTF Chairs, STF Chair
- All District TB officers
- IMA and IAP National President for dissemination
- All JEET partners (FIND, CHAI, CHRI)



(Dr. K. S. Sachdeva)